



Report to the Legislature

Foster Parent Retention and Stability of Foster Placements

Chapter 7, Laws of 2001, E2, Section 202(6)

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INTRODUCTION

This report is provided in accordance with the 2001 budget proviso requiring the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to report quarterly to the Legislature “progress against appropriate baseline measures for foster parent retention and stability of foster placements.” This report is for the period ending December 31, 2002.

The Building a Future for Washington’s Children: Foster Care Improvement Plan is a major component of the *Kids Come First Action Agenda*. This collaborative effort between the DSHS Children’s Administration (CA) and Casey Family Programs was published in May 2001 and was designed to develop long-term solutions to the challenges facing the foster care system. Key foster care and child welfare workers from throughout Washington State spent many hours working to create this framework to improve the retention of foster parents.

The retention of skilled and experienced foster parents is crucial in meeting the needs of vulnerable children placed in the child welfare system. When sufficient homes are available, children can be placed with families who are better equipped to provide for their unique needs. This, in turn, is likely to improve the stability of the children’s placements during the time they must remain in foster care away from their own families. These key outcomes of increased stability for children and increased retention of foster parents continue to be important strategic focuses of CA.

The information presented in this report begins with baseline data as of June 30, 2001, includes an annual update for fiscal year 2002, and presents quarterly data for the second quarter of fiscal year 2003.

RETENTION OF FOSTER HOMES

The Children’s Administration has been measuring foster home retention based on the net increase or decrease in the total number of licensed foster homes. CA recognizes that both the retention of currently licensed homes and the recruitment and licensure of new homes impact the total number of licensed foster homes; therefore, the current measure is, at best, a proxy of retention. The administration is exploring the issues around a possible new method to measure retention by measuring the rate foster parents leave the system and the reasons they leave.

Number of Licensed Foster Homes

Retention	June 30, 2001 Homes	June 30, 2002 Homes	December 31, 2002 Homes	Percent Change in Available Homes (6/01- 12/02)
Statewide	6,209	6,214	6,281	1.1 %
Region 1	844	854	867	2.7 %
Region 2	741	780	785	5.6 %
Region 3	887	912	914	3.0 %
Region 4	1,190	1,185	1,206	1.3 %
Region 5	1,190	1,117	1,172	(1.5 %)
Region 6	1,357	1,306	1,337	(1.5 %)

It is a priority of CA to increase the number of foster homes available to care for children and to improve the accuracy of foster home records. During the second quarter of FY 2003, a data cleanup of old licenses was completed. This resulted in significant changes to data for some regions for the previously reported June 30, 2002, data. Overall, the data in the chart above demonstrate a steady increase in the number of homes since June 2001 when CA began reporting on the number of licensed foster homes.

STABILITY OF PLACEMENTS

The Children's Administration measures stability of placements using the federal measure of "the percent of children with no more than two placements during the first 12 months in care." The number of children in stable placements showed an upward trend in most regions and the state between FY 2001 and FY 2002, as indicated in the chart below. The first and second quarters of fiscal year 2003 show a slight decrease in the percent of children with two or fewer placements when compared to the annual percent. This decrease is believed to be primarily the result of the calculation method, which is not well suited to a comparison of annual and quarterly data as is required here. The stability rate has improved from Quarter 1 to Quarter 2, and we expect the increase to continue.

Percent of Children with No More than Two Placements during First Twelve Months in Care

Stability of Placements	Fiscal Year 2001	Fiscal Year 2002	Percent Change FY01 to FY02	Fiscal Year 2003 Quarter 1	Fiscal Year 2003 Quarter 2
Statewide	81.1 %	85.5 %	4.4%	81.7 %	82.5 %
Region 1	86.9 %	91.0 %	4.1%	88.0 %	88.2 %
Region 2	79.4 %	82.0 %	2.6%	79.6 %	80.4 %
Region 3	76.9 %	76.0 %	(.9%)	74.2 %	74.2 %
Region 4	78.6 %	84.5 %	5.9%	80.0 %	83.1 %
Region 5	81.8 %	88.1 %	6.3%	82.1 %	83.3 %
Region 6	82.4 %	87.8 %	5.4%	85.0 %	84.7 %

WORK IN PROGRESS

Foster Care Improvement Plan

The Foster Care Improvement Plan (FCIP) has been restructured as the result of changes to Casey Family Programs, which had been a formal partner with CA. A new 11-member Project Management Team has begun work. The core members of the team are the leaders of the six FCIP regional teams. The Project Management Team also includes representatives from Casey Family Programs, a foster parent who is also a state manager with the Department of Health, and representatives from the Division of Licensed Resources (DLR).

A new Oversight Committee for the plan also is being developed. In addition to DSHS representatives, it will include Casey Family Programs and other major stakeholders. A representative from Lutheran Community Services, which holds the major state contract for recruitment of foster and foster/adopt parents, will join the committee. Other members also will be added.

The Foster Care Improvement Plan continues to be one of the top priorities of CA. The FCIP goals remain to improve the recruitment and retention of foster parents; improve the relationship between foster parents and CA; better measure satisfaction of the foster parents; and communicate more effectively with foster parents.

In addition, training by the American Public Human Services Association of upper level management on culture change is planned for late April.

Recruitment

Recruitment is increasing with 41 foster parent recruiters and six regional recruitment coordinators now in the field under the statewide contract with Families For Kids - Recruitment Resource. The March figures for newly licensed homes shows an increase of 142 homes during that month.

A contract also has been awarded to spend \$75,000 to recruit adoptive homes that reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of children in state care. The money comes from a trust fund administered by the department.

Culture Change

The Project Management Team has chosen as a priority to work on changing the agency culture to improve the relationship between foster parents and agency staff. The goal of changing the culture is at the center of the FCIP. It is one of the keys to improving retention of foster parents. The goal of improving the relationship is to keep foster families satisfied. Satisfied families are more likely to remain in the foster care system taking care of children.

From a list of 20 ideas discussed at the first meeting of the Project Management Team, three were chosen to help lay the groundwork for future action.

- One work group will research the rules, laws, and policies that govern the interaction between foster parents and the agency. These include issues around sharing information, appearing at court hearings, staffings, and having calls returned promptly, among other issues. The outcome of the work will be foster parents and agency staff members who share the same information about laws, regulations and policies. Everyone will be governed by the same information. This also will aid in clarifying roles and responsibilities for foster parents and agency staff members.

Another work group will research the underlying values held by foster parents and agency staff that both groups have in common and others that may cause barriers to a smooth working relationship. The outcome will be foster parents and agency staff members who have a better awareness and compassion for each other's jobs. A joint training model for foster parents and agency staff would be developed to reinforce and integrate the new awareness into day-to-day working relationships.

- A third work group will focus on creating a foster parent guidebook. It will discuss in easily understood language areas such as, "Things That Come In The Mail," service plans and medical coupons; "Show Me The Money," explaining financial issues like reimbursement and invoices; and "How's That Again?" explaining agency acronyms and terms. The outcome will be a written guidebook distributed to every foster parent describing the day-to-day, nuts-and-bolts reality of foster care.

These three activities are only a beginning. The commitment to move from identifying problems to identifying and implementing solutions will be the focus of the Project Management Team's work, even as CA works on other areas of recruitment and retention of foster parents.

Surveys

As CA increasingly moves toward data supporting practice, the need to develop a coordinated data collection system has become apparent. This is particularly true for measuring the satisfaction of parents who provide foster care. A survey will be piloted this spring to measure foster parent satisfaction. Once the pilot test is complete, a statewide satisfaction survey will be administered annually beginning in the Fall, 2003. The information collected from this annual survey will identify where CA needs to improve in order to increase FP satisfaction. The first annual survey will provide CA with a baseline of satisfaction against which to measure future survey results.

Two additional surveys will be conducted at the beginning of the licensing process. One will be distributed at the end of pre-service training and one when foster parents either receive their licenses or close their applications. These two surveys will provide information about the quality of the licensing process. It will also identify when and why foster parents do not complete the licensing process. A fourth survey will be done as foster parents exit the system. This will tell us why foster parents leave the system and what we can do to support them so they continue to provide care. CA will pilot these 3 surveys and implement a state wide surveying system.

Kinship

As the result of a team put together as part of the FCIP, work continues to increase the number of kinship placements.

Pilot testing will be done in Regions 2 and 4 on a licensing system that might expedite kinship placements. The group is exploring how to utilize the statute allowing initial licenses without jeopardizing federal funding requirements. All the work around kinship is designed to increase retention and stability of children, since children who can stay with people they know are more likely to remain stable.

Breakthrough Series Collaborative

Work continues on the Casey Family Programs Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) in the pilot sites in Yakima, Tri-cities, Sunnyside and Toppenish. The regional group just finished a video called "Common Ground" that outlines a dispute resolution process. The video shows how the process works. The "Common Ground" process has been tried with foster parents and social workers and has been found to be a positive resolution to issues.

The BSC team also did a "windshield tour" of the pilot site, driving through areas to identify resources that may have been overlooked to increase the number of foster homes, particularly Hispanic foster homes that are a focus of the BSC. A number of ideas emerged from that effort.

Communication

Two ideas are being developed at headquarters to increase communication both between CA and foster parents and internally.

- A bulletin board site will be developed for the FCIP to share ideas from around the state and around the country. Regions work on many different initiatives that would be worth sharing statewide. Ideas are coming from the Breakthrough Series teams around the country that also could be posted on such a site.

- A computerized e-mail list of foster parents will be created so CA can better and more quickly communicate with foster parents who have computers with Internet access. One BSC team has found that a large number of foster parents have both computers and Internet access and want to receive contact electronically.

Retention of homes remains CA's primary focus to increase the overall number of foster parents. The end result of both successful recruitment and retention work will be better and more stable homes for kids.